

School Meals Initiative Nutrition Standards and Menu Planning Approaches

In June 1995, the School Meals Initiative (SMI) and Public Law 104-149 amended the Federal Regulations 7 CFR Parts 210 and 220 establishing the National School Lunch and School Breakfast Programs nutrition standards and incorporating the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. In June 2000, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) final rule was issued updating the SMI menu planning approaches. School Food Authorities (SFA) are required to implement SMI and must select from the following five approaches for menu planning to meet the nutrition standards:

- * **Nutrient Standard Menu Planning (NSMP)**
- * **Assisted Nutrient Standard Menu Planning (ANSMP)**
- * **Enhanced Food Based Menu Planning (EFBMP)**
- * **Traditional Food Based Menu Planning (TRAD'L)**
- * **Alternate Menu Planning** including Shaping Health As Partners in Education (SHAPE) California and other Menu Planning Approaches

Definition of Implementation

Implementation is defined as planning and preparing meals using one of the approved meal planning systems and actively moving toward compliance with the nutrition standards as outlined below.

Nutrition Standards for the National School Lunch Program

- ◆ Requires school lunches to meet one-third of the Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDA) for protein, calcium, iron, vitamin A, vitamin C, and specific levels of calories.
- ◆ Requires compliance with the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* for children over the age of two. These are: Eat a variety of foods; choose a diet low in fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol; select plenty of vegetables, fruits and grain products; use sugar in moderation; and use salt and sodium in moderation. Menus are to contain no more than 30 percent of calories from total fat and less than 10 percent of calories from saturated fat.
- ◆ Requires schools to decrease the levels of sodium and cholesterol and increase the amount of dietary fiber in meals.

- ◆ Requires schools to maintain menu and production records, which demonstrate that the required number of food components, food items, or menu items are offered each given day.
- ◆ SFAs must demonstrate that lunches meet the nutrition standards for specific age/grade groupings when averaged over each school week. (A school week is defined as a minimum of three consecutive days and a maximum of seven consecutive days.) Charts with the nutrition standards can be found in regulations 7 CFR sections 210.10 and 220.8 or on the Nutrition Services Division website under the School Meals Initiative Menu Planning Options at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/cyfsbranch/cnfdd/>.
- ◆ Allows any SFA operating the Summer Food Service Program, the Child Care Food Program, or the Adult Day Care Food Program to prepare meals using the NSMP alternative.

NOTE: All of the menu planning options require that the above standards be met.

Nutrient Standard Menu Planning (NSMP)

- ◆ Requires a **nutrient analysis** of meals to be analyzed for protein, calcium, iron, vitamin A, vitamin C, calories, and fat.
- ◆ Requires **nutrient analysis** to be conducted on all menu items or foods offered as part of the reimbursable meal. The analysis must be based on information provided in the National Nutrient Database for Child Nutrition Programs, which is included in the USDA approved software.
- ◆ Requires that **meals be monitored** to ensure they contain reduced levels of sodium and cholesterol, increased dietary fiber, and include a variety of foods.
- ◆ In NSMP or ANSMP, the definition of a **menu item** is any single food or combination of foods served. An entree may be a combination of food or a single food that is offered as the main course. A reimbursable lunch offered to students shall include a minimum of three menu items. One menu item must be the entrée; a second menu item would be fluid milk as a beverage, and a third menu item would be a side dish. The nutrients in reimbursable lunches, when averaged over a school week, must meet the established nutrition standards for the age or grade group served.
- ◆ Under **Offer versus Serve**, at least three menu items must be offered including an entree and fluid milk. For the meal to be reimbursable, the student must select at least two menu items, one of which must be an entree. Students may decline no more than two menu items even if more than three menu items are offered.

- ◆ Requires all **software** used in conducting the nutrient analysis to be evaluated and approved by the USDA Food and Nutrition Service to ensure it meets the minimum requirements established by the USDA. Information can be found on the Internet at <http://schoolmeals.nal.usda.gov:8001/software/index.html>.
- ◆ Requires **standardized recipes** to be developed and followed at each site to ensure the nutrient analysis is accurate for the foods offered in the meal.
- ◆ Requires that menu items offered as part of a reimbursable meal be analyzed based on weighted averages. **Weighted averages** result in nutritional analysis that is specific for each site and is based on the projected number of students selecting each item in proportion to the rest of the meal. Note: USDA permits the use of simple averaging of nutrient analysis through June 2003.
- ◆ Requires **nutrient analysis for purchased and/or processed foods** used in reimbursable meals. If a processed food is not in the National Nutrient Database, the SFA can incorporate the appropriate information into the database at the local level.

Assisted Nutrient Standard Menu Planning (ANSMP)

- ◆ **Requires the State to approve the initial menu cycle**, recipes, and other specifications to determine that all required elements for correct nutrient analysis are incorporated.
- ◆ Allows an **alternative for schools that desire to do NSMP**, but may not have the resources to work independently. This method draws on the expertise of professionals, such as the federal or state government, other SFAs, or consultants to develop and establish menu cycles that meet the nutrition standards for nutrients, calories, and fat levels for the specific age or grade group. Cycle menus would be developed to consider local food preferences and child nutrition program operations.
- ◆ Requires that **recipes, food product specifications, and preparation techniques** be developed and provided by the entity doing the menus to ensure that the menu items and foods offered conform to the nutrient analysis completed on the menu cycle.
- ◆ Requires those doing ANSMP to **follow the requirements listed under NSMP**, including those for the database, software, and weighted nutrient analysis.

Enhanced Food Based Menu Planning (EFBMP) Lunch

- ◆ Requires a meal pattern to be followed, which includes two to three grade groupings and minimum food quantities. The groupings are:

Ages 1-2 and Preschool
Grades K-3 (optional)

Grades K-6
Grades 7-12

- ◆ Requires meals to provide minimums for calories and nutrient levels. The maximum levels of total fat are not to be more than 30 percent of the calories for the week. The saturated fat levels are set at no more than 10 percent of calories over a school week. During a technical assistance SMI review, State staff will complete this analysis based on the SFAs information.
- ◆ **Meat/Meat Alternate** - There is an increase in the minimum serving size for children in grades K-3 from 1½ ounces to 2 ounces if they are included in the K-6 grade group. However, if the optional meal pattern for grades K-3 is served separately, 1½ ounces may be served. Yogurt can be included as a meat/meat alternate.
- ◆ **Fruits and Vegetables** - Requires an increase in the amount of fruits and vegetables made available over the course of a week.
 - For grades K-6, the minimum serving size is ¾ cup per meal plus an additional ½ cup served over a five-day period.
 - For grades 7-12, the minimum serving size is increased to one cup per day.
 - For the optional grades K-3 meal pattern, the minimum serving size is increased to ¾ cup per day.
- ◆ **Grains/Breads** - Requires an increase in the total serving of grains/breads over a five-day period. Retains a minimum of one serving each day for each group, and permits up to one serving of grains/breads per day in the form of a dessert. Requirements are:
 - For grades K-6, 12 servings per week;
 - For grades 7-12, 15 servings per week;
 - For the optional grades K-3, 10 servings per week.
- ◆ **Milk** - Requires fluid milk to be offered. The types of milk offered are to be consistent with the types of milk consumed in the prior year. However, if a specific type of milk represents less than one percent of the total amount of milk consumed in the previous year, the school may elect not to offer that type of milk. There are no changes in the minimum serving sizes for fluid milk.

- ◆ **Offer Versus Serve** - Requires all five food items to be offered to students at lunch. Senior high students and, at the discretion of the SFA, students below senior high may be permitted to decline a maximum of two of the required five food items. Offer versus Serve provisions have not changed. The meal must be priced as a unit.

Traditional Food Based Menu Planning (TRAD'L)

- ◆ Allows schools to serve the meal pattern in effect during the 1994-95 school year.
- ◆ **Requires meals to meet the nutrition standards.**
- ◆ **Does not require a computer** under this menu planning option, although one may be used as an assessment tool in determining whether or not the reimbursable meals served meet the nutrition standards.
- ◆ **Standardized recipes** are required. Nutrient analysis should be obtained on all processed and pre-prepared foods served. **Menu production records** continue to be required.
- ◆ **Offer versus Serve** requires all five food items to be offered to students at lunch. Senior high students and, at the discretion of the SFA, students below senior high may be permitted to decline a maximum of two of the required five-food items. The meal must be priced as a unit.

Alternate Menu Planning Approaches

Minor Pre-approved Modifications of Alternate Menu Planning

USDA allows three minor modifications for sponsors using one of the food based menu planning approaches. These modifications may be implemented if the district has written documentation available for review and monitoring purposes for each participating site.

1. Schools using food based approaches may follow the levels for the majority of children and use pre-approved minimum nutrient and quantity requirements if only one age or grade is outside the established levels. This option was previously only available under NSMP and ANSMP approaches [reference 7 CFR section 210.10 (I)(2)(iii)].
2. Schools using Traditional may select one of two options regarding nutrient standards. They may use the nutrient standards developed that correspond with the original age/grade groupings for Traditional or those previously

- established for Enhanced, NSMP, and ANSMP [reference 7 CFR section 210.10 (I)(2)(ii)].
3. The minimum required quantities of the meat/meat alternate component under the food based menu planning approaches may be offered as a weekly total. A one-ounce (or the equivalent) daily serving size is the minimum requirement. This does not apply if the minimum serving of meat/meat alternate is less than one ounce [reference 7 CFR section 210.10 (I)(2)(i)].

Major Modifications in Alternate Menu Planning Approaches

Major modifications to one of the four existing menu planning approaches or development of new menu planning approaches may also be implemented with State approval.

Shaping Health As Partners in Education (SHAPE) California

- ◆ SHAPE California agencies have created partnerships with parents, administrators, industry, and the community to promote healthy menus, nutrition education, and an agency nutrition policy for the benefit of students. SHAPE agencies may use the USDA NSMP, USDA ANSMP, USDA TRAD'L, USDA EFBMP, or SHAPE California Nutrient Standard Menu Planning (SNSMP) or the SHAPE California Revised Meal Pattern (SRMP). Under the final rule districts implementing the SHAPE California Approach may continue to use alternate menu planning SNSMP and SRMP for approved sites. Child Nutrition Program sponsors who do not participate in SHAPE California may not use the SNSMP or SRMP menu planning options.
- ◆ **SHAPE California Nutrient Standard Menu Planning:** SHAPE California agencies who select this option are required to follow prescribed guidelines developed by SHAPE agencies. This option is similar to the USDA NSMP with some modifications. For example, SHAPE districts follow the same nutrient standards as the USDA menu planning approach, but fat and saturated fat are recommended targets, not standards. In addition, SHAPE agencies using this option follow modified Offer versus Serve rules meaning that SHAPE agencies using SHAPE NSMP are not required to take an entrée for the meal to be reimbursable. Also, weighted averages are not required.
- ◆ **SHAPE California Revised Meal Pattern:** This option, similar to the USDA TRAD'L, is an enhanced version of the Traditional Meal Pattern. Additional servings of fruits, vegetables, breads and grains have been included. However, some of the food crediting and quantity requirements under the SRMP are not the same as the USDA TRAD'L. For example, only 12 grains/breads servings per week are required for the high school grade group compared to 15 with

USDA TRAD'L. In addition, desserts do not count towards the grains/breads requirement in the same manner. Also, SHAPE California agencies electing to use this menu planning option must offer a minimum of one cup per week of raw fruits and vegetables and substitute 1/4 cup of beans for one ounce of meat/meat alternate per week.

New Alternate Menu Planning Approaches

In developing an alternate approach, districts must meet all of the following criteria:

- ◆ **The alternate menu planning approach must be available in writing for review and monitoring purposes.** Guidance material, a handbook, or protocol is sufficient to submit for approval [reference 7 CFR section 210.10(l)(3)].
- ◆ Significant changes to existing approaches or new menu planning systems must meet the criteria explained in Management Bulletin 00-113 and submitted to the State for approval prior to implementation.

Nutrition Standards for the School Breakfast Program

- ◆ Allows SFAs to choose one of the menu planning options for breakfast, which may or may not be the same as the option chosen for lunch.
- ◆ Grade groupings are the same for Enhanced Food Based Menu Planning and the Traditional Meal Pattern. This includes servings of milk, grain/breads, fruit/vegetable, and optional meat/meat alternates. Nutrition standards for grade and/or age groupings have been developed for use with NSMP and Assisted NSMP.
- ◆ Requires school breakfasts to meet one-fourth of the Recommended Dietary Allowance for protein, calcium, iron, vitamin A, vitamin C, and specific levels of calories as well as comply with the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*. Requires menus to provide no more than 30 percent of calories from total fat and less than 10 percent of calories from saturated fat. Breakfasts shall meet the nutrition standards when averaged over a school week.
- ◆ **Offer versus Serve** requires at least three menu items be offered. Senior high students and, at the discretion of the SFA, students below senior high may be permitted to decline a maximum of one item offered.
- ◆ If doing **weighted averages**, SFAs may combine nutrient analysis of the NSLP and SBP menus. Such analysis shall be proportionate to the levels of participation in the two programs. Therefore, if simple averages are used for breakfast and lunch analysis, breakfast and lunch analyses cannot be combined.